



Caerleon Roman Amphitheatre

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Prepared by the Department of the Environment
on behalf of the Welsh Office

Caerleon Roman Amphitheatre and Barrack Buildings

MONMOUTHSHIRE

Theatr Gron Rufeinig Caerllion a Llety'r Milwyr

SIR FYNWY

by

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Caerleon in legend and history

CAERLEON, two miles from Newport in Monmouthshire, was at one time a Roman legionary fortress and later a centre of Arthurian legend. To the Romans it was known as *Isca*, from the Celtic name of the river (Usk) whereby it stands. The later Welsh, by a natural paradox, preferred to enshrine its Roman traditions in a name derived from the Latin; for 'Caerleon' is, it seems, the Latin phrase *castra legionum*, 'camp of the legions', in Welsh guise. The same name was also given by the Welsh to another legionary fortress, Chester, and even to places such as Leicester, which were not fortresses at all. But Caerleon-on-Usk was the Caerleon *par excellence*, and it was here 'upon the river Usk near the Severn Sea' a place 'most pleasant and fit for so great a solemnity', that the King Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth's romantic *British History* was crowned amidst a host of princes and prelates. 'On one side', wrote Geoffrey, 'the city was washed by that noble river, so that the kings and princes from the countries beyond the seas might have the convenience of sailing up to it. On the other side, the beauty of the meadows and groves, and the magnificence of the royal palaces with gilded roofs that adorned it, made it even rival the grandeur of Rome'.

Such was the Caerleon of medieval fable; such also the Caerleon of Tennyson's *Idylls*. And in the twelfth century, when Geoffrey wrote, there was still a fair show of ancient architecture upon the site to prove the tale. Another, less imaginative, Welshman, Gerald of Barry, who passed that way in 1188, found that 'the city was handsomely built of masonry, with courses of bricks, by the Romans. Many vestiges of its former splendour may yet be seen, immense palaces formerly ornamented with gilded roofs in imitation of Roman magnificence . . . a town of prodigious size, remarkable hot baths, relics of temples and theatres all enclosed within fine walls, parts of which remain standing. You will find on all sides, both without and within the circuit of the walls, subterraneous buildings, aqueducts underground passages; and, what I think worthy of notice, stoves contrived with wonderful art to transmit the heat insensibly through narrow tubes passing up the side of the walls'.

To-day, it is less easy to visualise the extent and character of the ancient fortress. Occasional fragments of wall (particularly at the southern corner of the fortress) and intermittent stretches of embankment and ditch show that the fortified area was oblong in plan with sides roughly 540 and 450 yards in length, and covered about 50 acres.

As a useful landmark to the visitor, it may be noted that Caerleon parish church stands in the centre of the fortress. Excavations have proved that this fortress was laid out about A.D. 75 at the time of the final pacification of Wales by the Romans. It was built as the headquarters of the Second Augustan Legion, one of the three legions quartered permanently in Britain, the others being stationed at Chester and at York. At this time, the legion consisted of between 5,000 and 6,000 men, most of them heavy-armed infantry of the type that formed the backbone of the Roman imperial army.

At first, the defences of the fortress were a stockaded earthwork fronted by a ditch, and the buildings within them were mostly of timber. During the second century, however, the earthwork was revetted externally with the stone wall already referred to, and the barracks and other buildings were largely reconstructed in masonry. Outside the defences, moreover, particularly on the level ground to the south-west, there had by then grown up a considerable settlement





of stone and timber buildings wherein the families of the soldiery and the traders, entertainers and others, who lived upon and under the protection of the garrison, were quartered. Here and there stood a temple of a shrine, such as the temple of Diana mentioned in an inscription, or the Mithraic shrine to which sculptures and an inscription also seem to testify. There also, and elsewhere about the fortress, stood the elaborate bath-buildings to which Gerald the Welshman referred and without which no Roman garrison was content. Amongst these various structures, close beneath the south-western defences, lay, too, the amphitheatre which in 1928, after excavation at the charge of the Proprietors of the *Daily Mail*, was taken over for preservation as a national monument by the Commissioners of Works, now the Department of the Environment. In its traditional name, King Arthur's Round Table, this amphitheatre forms a link with the romantic associations of the site; but, as revealed by excavation, it is a well-preserved example of a peculiarly Roman and unromantic type of structure.

A Roman amphitheatre consisted of an arena, oval on plan, surrounded by seats arranged in tiers and interrupted only (and that incompletely) by the entrances for the spectators or the performers. The latter were partly gladiators, variously equipped, and partly animals which were used for hunting-scenes, for bating, for combat, or for the torture of prisoners. In the larger amphitheatre horse-racing

might occasionally be introduced, but the circus or hippodrome was usually employed for this purpose. On rare occasions, too, the arena might in some cases be flooded for the staging of sea-fights, such as were included by the emperor Titus in the hundred-days spectacle wherewith, in A.D. 80 (at about the time when the Caerleon amphitheatre also was completed), he inaugurated the greatest of all amphitheatres, the Colosseum at Rome. In brief, the amphitheatre provided the organised outlet for the sportsmanship of the Roman world, and, if that sportsmanship was associated with much that was brutal and degrading, it was none the less representative of one aspect of the Roman character. Gladiatorial games were approved even by the gentle Pliny and were censured by Marcus Aurelius for their monotony rather than for their bestiality. It was not, indeed, until A.D. 325 that the first Christian emperor of Rome sought, with only partial success, to abolish them, and the use of amphitheatres for bull-baiting and similar sports has continued in parts of Latin Europe to the present day.

The amphitheatre would also be used for the training of troops, weapon training and demonstration and as a place where the entire legion could be assembled where necessary.

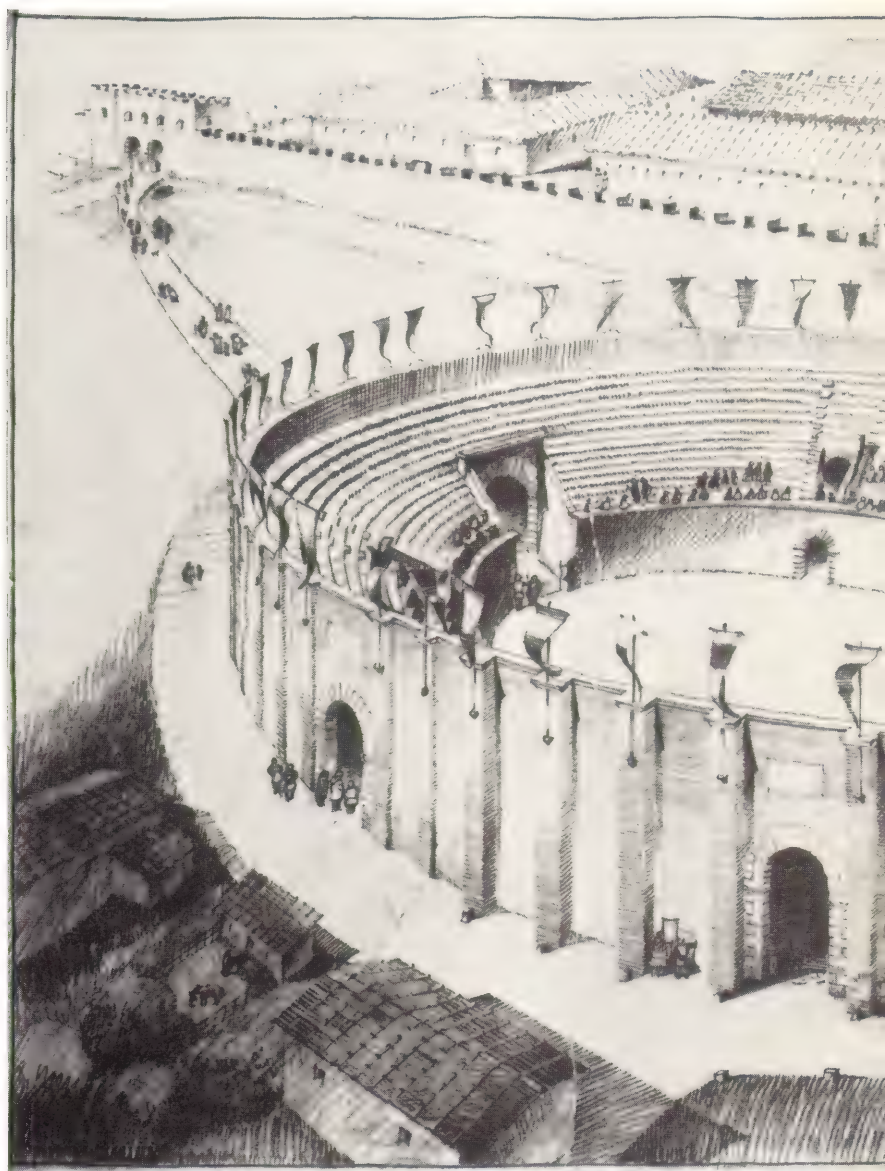
The Amphitheatre

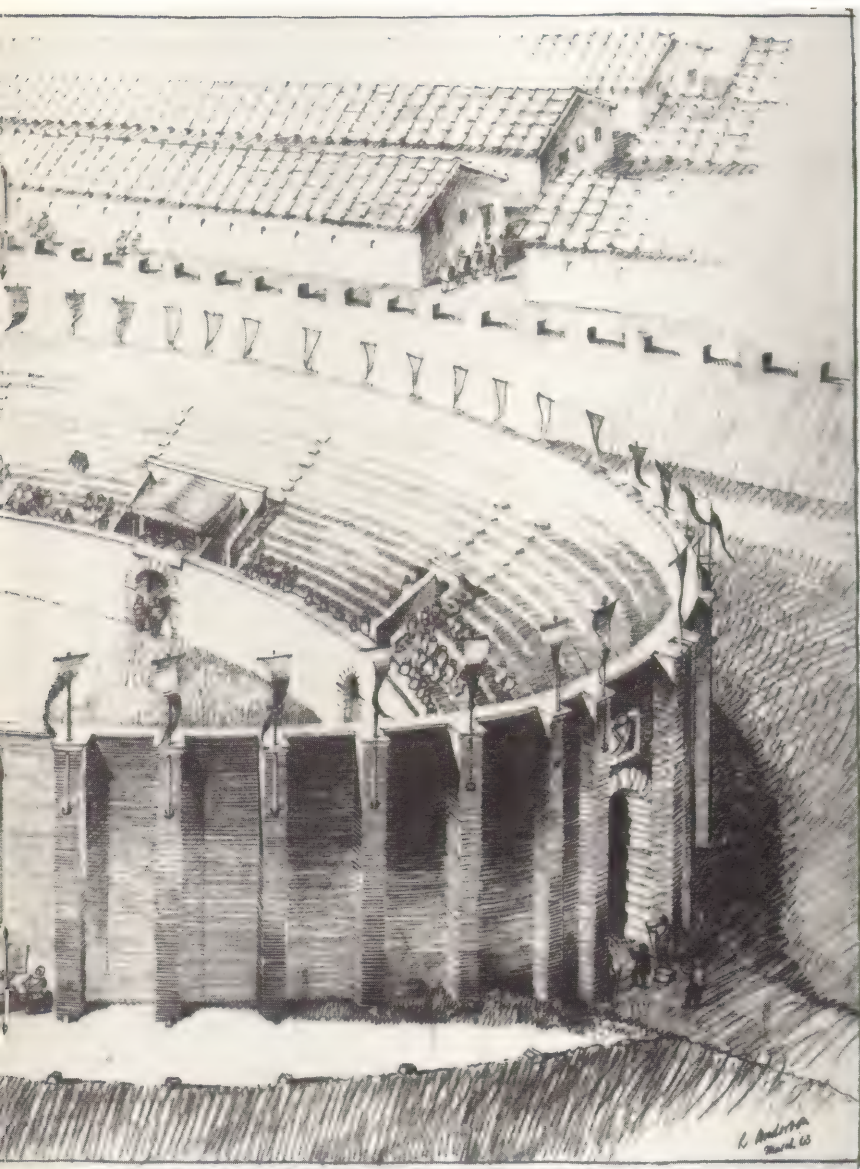
THE legionary fortress of Caerleon was built in the latter part of the first century A.D. Before the amphitheatre was constructed other buildings had existed upon its site and some of these, among them a bath building, were destroyed or altered to make room for it. The alterations to this bath building had been carried out before the end of the first century A.D. and this and similar evidence from other parts of the site clearly indicate that the amphitheatre can be assigned to the last twenty years of the first century A.D. Various alterations of about A.D. 125-30 may represent a general renovation by detachments of the Legion after their return from taking part in the construction of Hadrian's Wall in the north of England. Not long after this renovation the amphitheatre fell into decay and by the beginning of the third century much of it was in a ruinous condition. It is clear, however, that works of repair were then undertaken and the building continued in use until the end of that century. In the fourth century not only the gradual disuse of amphitheatres in general, but special local causes must have contributed to its decay as well as the transfer of the Legion, or part of it, to the fort at Richborough on the coast of Kent. There the Legion played its part in the defence of the country against the attacks of the Saxons while its former territory was strengthened by a strong, newly built, fortress at Cardiff.

The arena, 184 ft long and 136½ ft broad, is hollowed out of the hillside, and its timber seats, long vanished, were formerly ranged round the earthen bank, partly natural and partly artificial, which rose to a maximum height of 28 ft above the arena floor. This earthen bank was supported internally and externally by stone walls, the inner of which rose to a height of about 12 ft, whilst the outer, buttressed externally and, in part, internally, reached a height of about 32 ft above the same datum. The arena-wall was brought to a hard, smooth surface by rendering it with mortar: patches of this mortar can still be seen. The external wall-faces, together with the flanks of the entrances, were brought to a level surface by rough pointing upon which false joints were worked and coloured with crimson paint. A fragment of this crimson jointing can be seen in Entrance B (see plan).

The task of construction was carried out, after a common Roman fashion, by various units of the legion, to each of which was assigned a separate portion of the work. On the completion of the allotted portion, the unit inscribed its name upon some part of it as a temporary

An artist's impression of the amphitheatre as it might have appeared





record, although that record was shortly to be obscured by the rendering with which the masonry was to be covered. Of these record stones, four may still be seen in the surviving walls, whilst others were found amongst the fallen masonry during the excavations. The four still in position are as follows:

In the arena wall near Entrance C. C(ENTURIA) FVL(VI) MAC(ERI), *i.e.*, 'The century (or company) of Fulvus Macer (built this)'.

In the western side of Entrance F. COHO(RS) VIII, *i.e.*, 'The ninth cohort (built this)'.

In the arena wall to the north of Entrance H. COH(ORS) X, C(ENTVRIA) (FLAV(I) IVLIN(I). *i.e.*, 'The tenth cohort, the century of Flavius Julinus (built this)'. The right-hand half of this inscription remains in position as reinserted during a repair in Roman times. The left-hand half was found elsewhere in debris.

In the arena wall to the south of Entrance H, reinserted upside down during repair-work in Roman times (C(ENTURIA) SADI TIR(ONIS), *i.e.*, 'The century of Sadius Tiro (built this)'.

The entrances are eight in number, and have been lettered A to H (see plan). The two main ones to the arena are B and F. The floors of these entrances slope gently downwards to the arena-level, and the outer half of each of them was at one time spanned by a stone barrel-vault of which slight traces remain in Entrance B. Over this vault, as in other Roman amphitheatres, the upper tiers of seats were carried continuously. The inner limits of the vaulting are indicated by the massive freestone jambs about half-way along the entrance and, in Entrance B, by two of the voussoirs of the former terminal arch. In Entrance F, sockets cut into the jamb-stones indicate the use of bars to form a barricade; at the south-east corner of this entrance, a stone now flush with the floor shows a socket filled with lead which at one time presumably held a vertical bar or pivot. In the middle of the same entrance, a column drum was used as a central socket-stone for a similar purpose.

In the open part of Entrance F begins a stone-lined drain, formerly covered save where the gutter which surrounds the arena discharged into it at Entrance F and B. As it dips beneath the ramp of Entrance B, this drain increases to a height of no less than 8 ft. Outside Entrance B, it joins another drain leading from an adjacent bath-building and then proceeds towards the river.

The six other entrances were to provide access to the seats. As originally constructed, the outer half of each of these entrances, like B and F, was covered with a stone vault of which a fragment can still be seen in Entrance C. Entrances A, C, E and G were of simple design. In the lower half of each entrance, a flight of stone steps led upwards towards the level of the seats and then on the reverse side downwards to the arena; remains of these steps can still be seen in Entrances A and G.

Entrances D and H are larger and of more elaborate plan. Their most distinctive feature is the inclusion of a small chamber opening both on to the arena and, originally, on to the main staircase. From the base of this staircase two smaller lateral stairs opened through brick-turned arches, of which one in Entrance H remains largely intact. The small chambers were originally roofed with a barrel-vault of which traces can be detected in Entrance H; and over this vault was a 'box' or seat of honour for the use of distinguished visitors. The wider of the lateral stairs in each entrance was used to provide access to this box, whilst the other gave admission to the seats on the adjacent bank. Small rooms provided beneath these entrances are not infrequently found in Roman amphitheatres, and were doubtless used to lodge performers (human or animal) whilst awaiting their turn in the ring. The room in Entrance D still retains the remains of stone benches.

The Prysg Field Barrack-Buildings

This large, open field, which lies some 300 yds north-west of the amphitheatre, occupies what was the western angle of the fortress and was explored in 1927-9. Of the buildings then laid bare one is now preserved under the care of the Department of the Environment, and three others are represented by Government plans in stone at a higher level. The remains uncovered included stretches of the south-western and north-western fortress-defences and their adjuncts, a series of ovens and cook-houses backing the south-western defences, a latrine building adjoining the western fortress-angle, a line of rampart-buildings inserted in the north-western defences and ten out of twelve barrack-buildings extending across the interior of the site, between the corner and the *via decumana*.

Defences

These comprised an outer V-shaped ditch, about 30 ft wide by 9 ft deep, a stone rampart-wall, 5 ft thick and originally about 20 ft high (including the battlements) a series of stone turrets (averaging 15 ft square) attached to the inside of the stone wall at 50-yard intervals, to house the sentry-posts responsible for patrolling the battlements, a clay bank, 20 ft broad and 8 ft high, laced and revetted with timber, and the rampart-roadway, 23 ft wide, with a stone kerb on one side and a culvert (originally slabbed over) on the other. As already noted, the ditch and the bank represented the original defences of the fortress, constructed about A.D. 75, the stone wall (with its turrets) a later addition dating from the second century.

Ovens and cook-houses

Traces of six or more ovens are to be seen in model form grouped in pairs along the inside of the south-western defences. They were circular domed structures built of tiles and masonry, with tile or slab floors, measuring about 8 ft in overall diameter, with walls about a foot thick and an opening, 2 ft wide, in front. They were probably covered originally with long wooden sheds, and dated from the first occupation of the fortress in 75. Later, they were superseded by square cook-houses of stone, added behind the wall-turrets, which by this time had been wholly or partly dismantled. One of the furnace-chambers backing the north-western defences was later demolished

Prysg Field. The western corner of the fortress, showing ovens (originally of stone and tile) in the foreground, a corner turret in the centre and a latrine to the rear



to make way for other buildings; remains of two other chambers are preserved. They measured roughly 25 ft square, and were equipped with a built-in furnace, central flue, and tiled floor.

Latrine building

This stood in the western fortress-angle immediately to the north-west of the corner cook-house, with which it was probably contemporary. It comprised a rectangular chamber (29 ft by 19 ft overall), entered through an anteroom at the south-west end which also contained a tank of water for flushing purposes. A stone-built channel carried round three sides of the chamber below floor-level was originally surmounted by a row of wooden seats. The drainage from the latrine was carried by branch-drains under the rampart-roadway into the main culvert-system of the fortress.

Rampart buildings

These were inserted in the north-western defences in the open space between the rampart and the rampart-roadway. As first constructed, they comprised four long narrow oblong structures extending from the western fortress-angle to the north-west gate. Towards the middle of the century one of the buildings, at the south-western end of the row, was dismantled to give place to the latrine-building (already described). In the third century, the remaining buildings in the row were also removed and replaced by a single continuous structure, symmetrically planned in three conjoined ranges of rooms backed on to the stone rampart between the latrine and the fortress-gate. This later structure like the earlier buildings, when excavated, yielded numerous small arms—iron arrowheads and bolts, lance-heads, javelin-heads, and bow-fittings—suggesting that like them it had served as a military stores. Its occupation ceased at the end of the third century.

The barrack building

The interior of the site was occupied by a row of barrack-buildings. There were ten in all, which, with two in the unexcavated north-eastern part of the site, would afford accommodation for two complete legionary cohorts (battalions). The remains of one of the buildings (at the south-western end of the row) are preserved at the original Roman ground-level; the walls of three adjoining buildings are marked out on the present surface. The barrack-buildings lay in pairs, facing inwards on to a common street or court, each building housing a single company or century under its centurion, each pair of buildings a double company or manipule. The pairs of buildings were further grouped in blocks of three or six to accommodate an exact complement of one or two cohorts. The planning of the barracks, as indeed of the fortress generally, was thus closely related to the organization of the legion. In appearance the buildings were oblong structures, each measuring nearly 250 ft long and 40 ft wide. The centurion and perhaps his subordinate officers occupied a separate block of rooms at one end of the building, while the men's quarters consisted of a row of twelve double cubicles, with a paved colonnade or verandah in front, forming the main body of the hutment. An examination of the centurion's quarters in the different buildings showed that in almost every case the end room in front was equipped with a paved floor and

stone gulleys, and had presumably been a wash-room; the other rooms were ranged on either side of a central passage. In the case of the men's quarters the inner and larger room of the cubicles was the living room where five or six men lived and slept, the smaller room in front the accoutrements-room where the men deposited their arms and equipment when off duty.

Like the other buildings in the fortress the barracks were substantially constructed of good mortared masonry, with tiled, paved, or cemented floors, glazed windows, and red-tiled roofs. They were built during the second century (to replace earlier barrack-huts of timber), and continued in occupation till about 200 or later, some being restored in the early third century.

Caerllion

Amddiffynfa Ail Leng Augustus oedd Caerllion, sef Isca'r Rhufeiniaid, a sefydlwyd yn 74 O.C. neu 75 O.C. gan Sextus Julius Frontinus. Mae'r amddiffynfa'n sefyll ar 50 erw o dir (20.5 o 'hectares'), a'r eglwys bresennol yn sefyll yn y canol. Gellir gweld yr amddiffynfeydd o hyd, i raddau, yn enwedig yn y cornel deheuol, gyferbyn â'r theatr gron, lle mae darn da o'r mur yn dal i sefyll. Pridd a choed oedd y muriau'n wreiddiol, ond rhoddwyd haen o gerrig arnynt yn yr ail ganrif. Coed oedd y rhan fwyaf o'r adeiladau mewnol yn wreiddiol, ond rhoddwyd cerrig yn eu lle bob yn dipyn. Y tu allan y trigai teuluoedd y nwlwyr ymysg masnachwyr, y baddonau a'r allorau, gan gynnwys temlau Mithras a Diana. Yma hefyd y safai'r theatr gron a gloddiwyd yn 1928 gan Syr Mortimer Wheeler ar draul y *Daily Mail*, ac a gyflwynwyd wedi hynny i'r genedl.

Adeiladwyd y theatr gron tua 80-100 O.C., a newidiwyd un o adeiladau'r baddonau cynharach i wneud lle iddi, a chulhawyd y ffos amddiffyn gyfagos. Trwsiodd hi tua 125 O.C., ac eto tua 200 O.C. Nis defnyddiwyd ar ôl y bedwaredd ganrif. Cadarnhawyd y clawdd pridd deuddeg troedfedd ar hugain o uchder a redai o amgylch yr arena â muriau cerrig, a chryfhawyd ef hefyd o'r tu allan. Yr oedd arno resi o seddau pren. Gwelir arysgrifau yn enwi'r unedau a fu'n gwneud y gwaith, ond yn wreiddiol, gorchuddid y rhain â haen o forter a weithiwyd i cfelychu cerrig nadd. Ceid wyth mynedfa gromen, dwy seremonïol fawr, a chwech a oedd yn llai o faint, yn cynnwys grisiau a arweiniai at y seddau. Mae dwy o'r mynedfeydd llai hefyd yn cynnwys ystafelloedd bychain ar gyfer anifeiliaid neu bobl yn disgwyl mynd i mewn i'r arena. Uwchben un o'r rhain yr oedd sedd arbennig ar gyfer llywydd y chwaraeon.

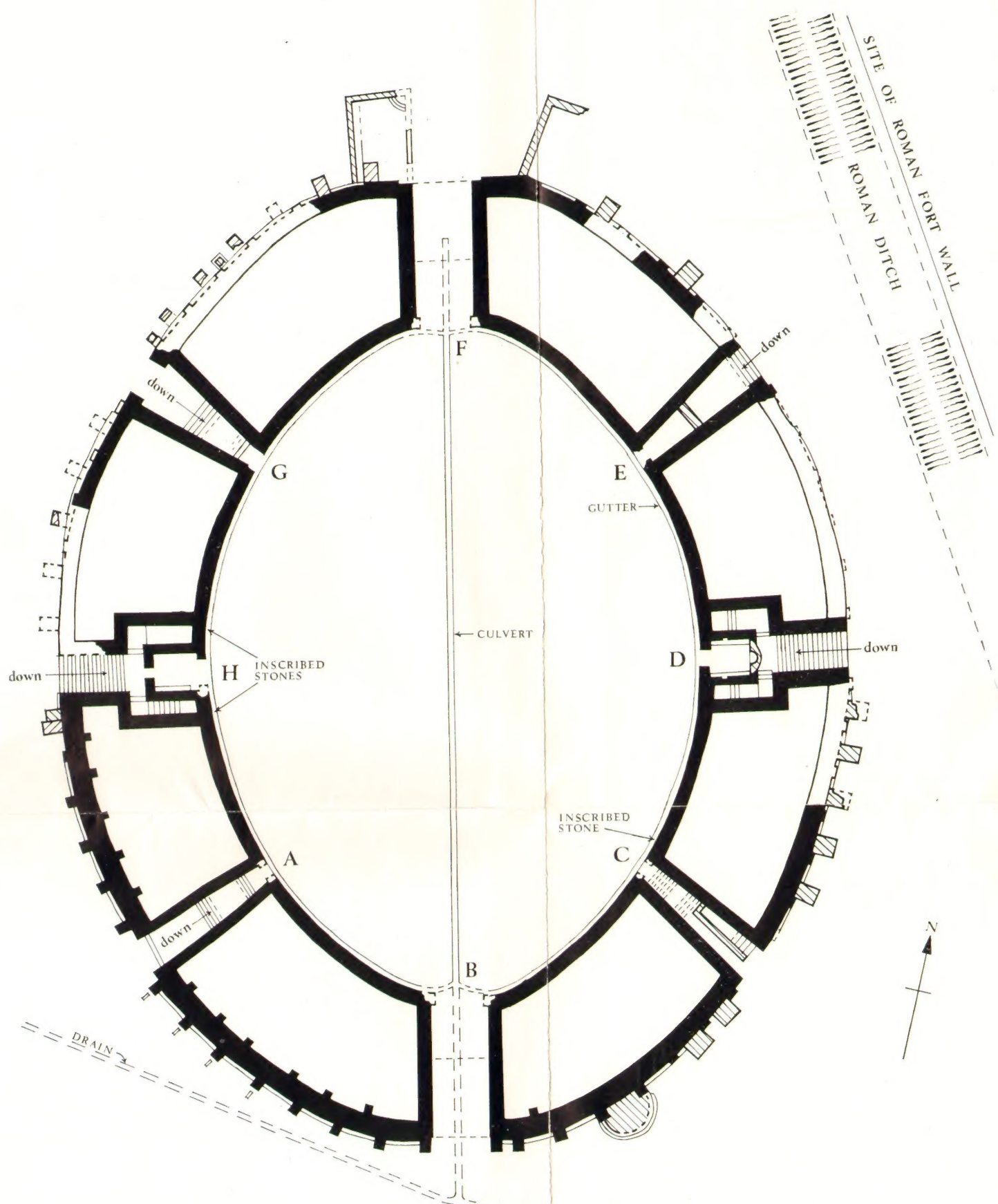
Yn ongl orllewinol yr amddiffynfa, 300 llath i'r Gogledd-Orllewin o'r theatr gron, gwelir grŵp o adeiladau gwersyll a'r rhes o amddiffynfeydd yn ymestyn oddi wrthynt. Un gwersyll yn unig sydd i'w weld mewn gwirionedd, gan fod y gweddill yn cael eu cynrychioli mewn 'cynlluniau mewn cerrig' ar lefel uwch.

Y mae'r ffos, sy'n 30 troedfedd o led, y tu allan i'r safle, ond gellir gweld y mur amddiffyn o gerrig a'r ddau dŵr wedi'u torri i mewn i'r clawdd clai 20 troedfedd o led ag astelli o goed arno. Ychwanegwyd da dŷ puobi y tu ôl i'r tyredau yn lle'r ffwrneisi crwn oedd ynghlwm wrthynt. Y tu ôl i'r clawdd ceir ffordd ac ar yr ochr Ogledd-Orllewinol, grŵp o adeiladau amddiffyn o'r ail a'r drydedd ganrif, gan gynnwys tŷ bach a stordai arfau.

Y mae'r adeiladau milwrol sy'n weladwy yn rhan o res o ddeuddeg, yn cartrefu dwy fintai. Trefnwyd hwy bob yn ddau, pob adeilad yn cartrefu can gŵr, a phob pâr yn cynnwys byddin. Trigai'r dynion mewn deuddeg pâr o ystafelloedd, (un ar gyfer offer, ac un fel lle bwyta ac ystafell gysgu). Ceid feranda o flaen pob pâr, tra'r oedd y canwriad a'i staff yn byw mewn rhes o ystafelloedd lletach a helaethach ar un pen.

CONVERSION TABLE

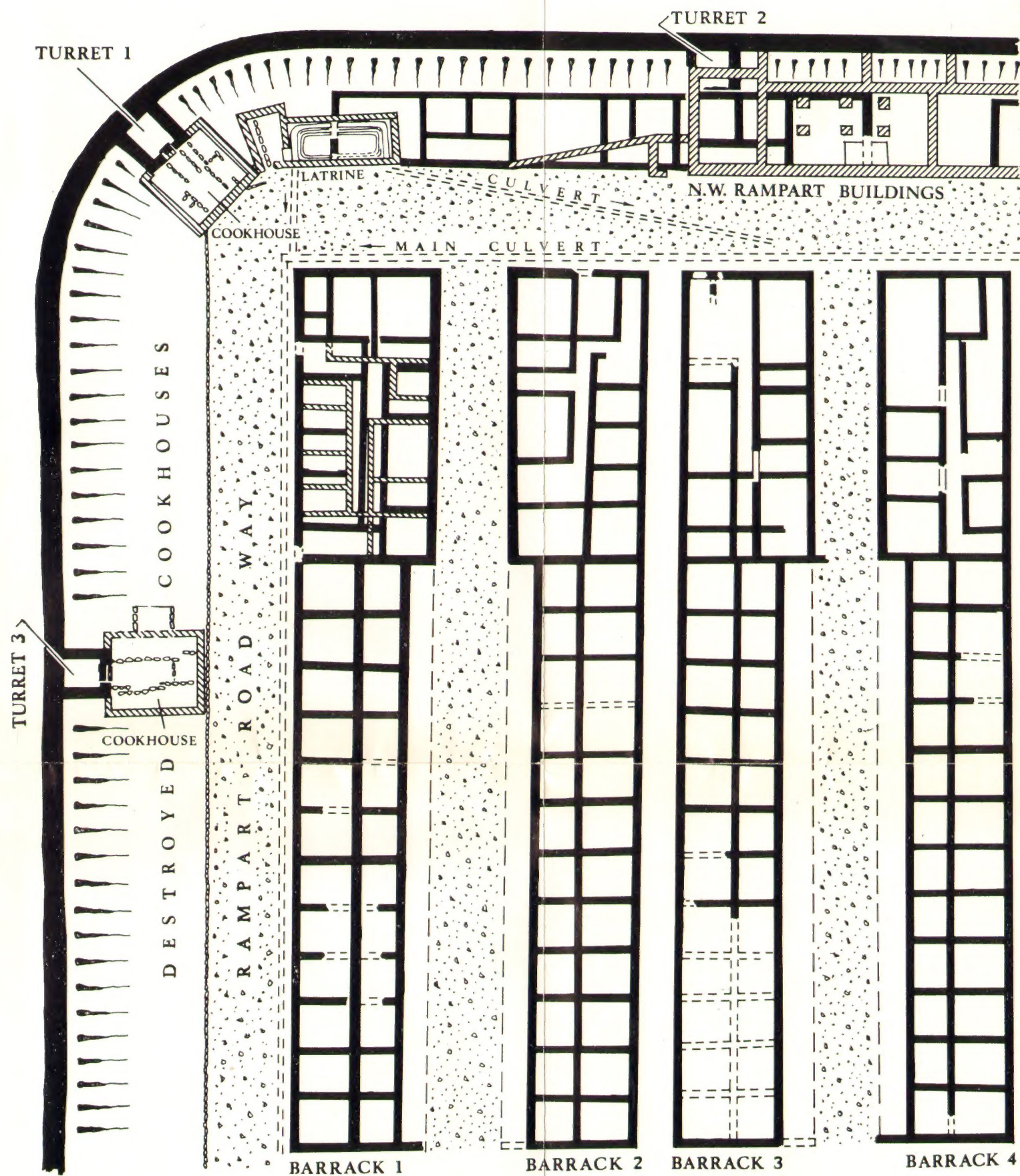
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20 ft	6.1 m	50 yd	45.7 m
25 ft	7.6 m	100 yd	91.4 m
30 ft	9.1 m	200 yd	182.9 m
35 ft	10.7 m	300 yd	274.3 m
40 ft	12.2 m	400 yd	365.8 m
45 ft	13.7 m	500 yd	457.2 m
50 ft	15.2 m	1000 yd	914.4 m
100 ft	30.5 m		
1 yd	0.9 m	1 acre	0.40 hectare
5 yd	4.6 m	5 acres	2.02 hectares
10 yd	9.1 m	10 acres	4.05 hectares
15 yd	13.7 m		
20 yd	18.3 m	1 mile	1.60 km
25 yd	22.9 m	5 miles	8.04 km
		10 miles	16.09 km



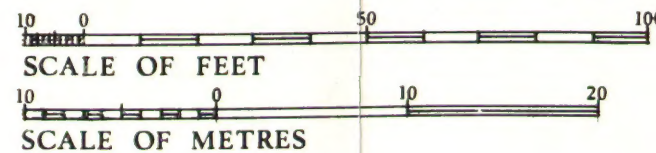
THE ROMAN
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